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Book Review of Alla Yaroshinskaya, Chernobyl: The Forbidden Truth

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Book Reviews

Alla Yaroshinskaya, *Chernobyl: The Forbidden Truth* (Michèle Kahn & Julia Sallabank, *trans.* University of Nebraska Press 1995). Introduction, foreword, list of illustrations, photographs. ISBN 0-8032-4912-8. [136 pp. Cloth \$25.00; Paper \$10.00. 312 N. 14th Street, Lincoln NE 68588-0484.]

From the *Introduction* and *Foreword* through eleven brief chapters, *Chernobyl: The Forbidden Truth*, is an in-depth look at one of the biggest tragedies of the 20th Century. Written by an Ukrainian journalist who later was a member of the commission created by the Supreme Soviet to investigate this tragedy, her book examines failure of Soviet and post-Soviet governments to protect the health of citizens in radiation-contaminated regions — and worse.

In the *Introduction*, David R. Marples notes that evidence of a massive “cover-up” meant that the affected population, remaining ignorant for three years, tilled irradiated soil and ate contaminated food. He condemns “failure to publicize the fact that more than 10,000 people were hospitalized less than two weeks after the explosion... or that some 1,500 were diagnosed as having radiation sickness.”¹ Marples also notes that the government reports that 8,000 cleanup workers have died, many workers who returned home are not included in follow-up monitoring, and that the death toll continues to climb among the three million citizens living in affected areas.

In the *Foreword*, John Gofman, a scientist studying the Chernobyl aftermath, discusses “biomedical unknowledge” — findings that are the opposite of truth regarding health and disease — and notes that financially and politically powerful interests are eager for unknowledge. They have a radiation research wish list that includes these propositions: (1) a little radiation improves human health, (2) there is a radiation threshold below which no bad health effects occur, and (3) slow delivery of radiation (from accidents such as Chernobyl) is less harmful than what would occur in war. Gofman discusses nine Rules of Research alleged to have been violated in nearly all epidemiological studies of

¹ At *xiii*.

radiation health effects. To ensure that Chernobyl studies do not further contribute to biomedical unknowledge, Gofman cautions that the public must avoid compromising control over input, processing, and analysis of data by having an independent team of scientists monitor any studies.

In Chapter 10, Yaroshinskaya lists 40, mind-numbing, secret protocols of the Politburo's group that dealt with Chernobyl. He classifies their protocols as lies, e.g., that "clean" products can grow on radioactive land. Yaroshinskaya also presents a long list of callous human behavior. Here are some examples. First, senior civil servants rushed their children to airports to remove them from danger, but only days after the April 26 accident, affected populations were permitted to engage in May Day activities. Second, when finally moved, some evacuees were relocated to quickly-built housing, much constructed on radioactive land, without stoves or ovens. Third, lacking funds to renovate a decrepit hospital at Obikhodi, a new building for the village Soviet could nevertheless be built across the street. Last, to achieve "equalization of internal levels of radioactivity," contaminated food was shipped to other parts of the Soviet Union to avoid destroying it — on the apparent premise that, if highly contaminated products are spread around, no one would be too badly affected

This book can be read in a few hours; I recommend it to anyone interested in issues such those it addresses. However, the book is not well produced. For example, indented paragraphs are mixed with ones that are not, and typesizes change for a line or two within paragraphs. One expects better quality from a university press.

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